MARVEL

ASTONISHING X-MEN® #3

SOULE • McGUINNESS • MORALES • KEITH

SNIKT

IMAGINE THIS.

YOU KILL EVERYONE YOU LOVE. PEOPLE WHO TRUST YOU. PEOPLE YOU'VE FOUGHT ALONGSIDE IN A THOUSAND BATTLES.

NNNF!

THE PEOPLE WHO LOVE YOU BACK.

ONE DAY... YOU ***SLAUGHTER*** THEM ALL.

KCHK

YOU'RE TRICKED...IT'S NOT YOUR ***FAULT***... BUT YOU DO IT.

THE BLOOD IS ON YOUR HANDS. LITERALLY ON YOUR HANDS.

AND THEN, SOMEHOW, MIRACULOUSLY, YOU STEP INTO THE PLACE OF YOUR YOUNGER SELF.

BEFORE IT ALL WENT SO DEEPLY WRONG.

YOUR FRIENDS...YOUR ***FAMILY***...STILL SEE YOU AS THE MAN THEY KNOW. BUT YOU REMEMBER EVERYTHING YOU DID TO THEM.

YOU'RE NOT THE MAN THEY KNOW.

YOU'RE THE MAN YOU ARE.

YOU ARE ***LOGAN.***

KRAK

THE X-MEN ARE NO STRANGERS TO NEW VERSIONS OF THEMSELVES APPEARING FROM OTHER DIMENSIONS, OTHER TIMES.

THEY TREAT YOU KINDLY, INVITE YOU TO THEIR COUNCILS, GIVE YOU EVERY CHANCE TO BE A HERO.

A *HERO.*

NNGH!

ALL THE WHILE, YOU CAN SEE THEIR BLOOD ON YOUR HANDS.

NO.

YOU CAN *FEEL* IT.

THAT IS ONE OF YOUR SECRETS.

THERE ARE OTHERS.

RRRAGH!

THE X-MEN WANT YOU TO BE A WOLVERINE. YOU CAN DO THAT. YOU CAN *PRETEND.*

BUT YOU ARE NOT WOLVERINE. YOU'LL NEVER BE THAT MAN AGAIN. NO MATTER WHAT YOU DO, THERE IS NO MORE *SAVING THE DAY.*

FOR YOU...

...THE DAY WAS LOST A LONG, LONG TIME AGO.

ACT I

ASTONISHING X-MEN

LIFE OF X
PART THREE

THE SHADOW KING AND CHARLES XAVIER ARE PLAYING A GAME. THE BOARD: THE REALITY-WARPING LANDSCAPE OF THE ASTRAL PLANE. THE PIECES: ROGUE, GAMBIT, MYSTIQUE, FANTOMEX AND LOGAN. IF THE SHADOW KING WINS, HE TAKES THEIR SOULS, THEIR BODIES AND OUR WORLD. IF XAVIER WINS, HE WILL BE ALLOWED TO GRANT HIS X-MEN A MERCIFUL DEATH. THIS IS ALL THERE IS – FOR XAVIER IS DEAD, HIS SPIRIT THE PRISONER OF THE SHADOW KING.

IN OUR WORLD, PSYLOCKE MAINTAINS A PSYCHIC LINK ATOP A LONDON SKYSCRAPER, ALLOWING THE SPIRIT-BOUND X-MEN TO REMAIN IN THE ASTRAL PLANE TO FIGHT THEIR DESPERATE BATTLE. BISHOP AND ANGEL STAND GUARD, PROTECTING HER FROM HUMAN AUTHORITIES WARY OF POWERFUL MUTANTS ACTING WITHOUT EXPLANATION IN ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST DENSELY POPULATED CITIES.

ALL FIVE X-MEN SURVIVED THE FIRST ROUND OF THE SHADOW KING'S GAME. ACCESS TO THE NEXT LEVEL CAME IN THE FORM OF THREE DOORS. EACH WAS LABELED – ONE FOR ROGUE AND GAMBIT, ONE FOR FANTOMEX AND MYSTIQUE, AND THE FINAL FOR LOGAN, WHO WILL WALK HIS PATH ALONE.

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LONDON.

POLICE

CEASE ALL USE OF METAHUMAN ABILITIES! DROP YOUR WEAPONS, AND LIE DOWN WITH YOUR HANDS OVER YOUR HEADS.

BISHOP, ANGEL--I CAN'T BREAK THIS CONNECTION. IF I DO, LOGAN AND THE OTHERS WILL BE TRAPPED IN THE ASTRAL PLANE.

THAT'S NOT THEIR ONLY PROBLEM. BEAST JUST TURNED INTO *MYSTIQUE.*

AGGRESSION OF ANY KIND WILL BE MET WITH IMMEDIATE DEADLY FORCE.

WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

FOCUS ON THE PROBLEM WE *CAN* SOLVE. WE NEED TO KEEP THESE FOOLS AWAY FROM PSYLOCKE.

YOU WILL NOT RECEIVE ANOTHER WARNING!

COMPLY!

ANY CHANCE OUR GUYS WILL BEAT THE SHADOW KING IN THE NEXT THIRTY SECONDS? HOW'S IT GOING IN THERE? THEY AT LEAST *CLOSE?*

I...CAN'T TELL. I THINK THEY'VE SPLIT UP, BISHOP. THE SIGNALS ARE CONFUSING.

PAIN... FEAR...CONFUSION... FIGHT...REFLEX...EVEN JOY.

ONE OF THEM IS JUST...***RESOLVE.*** NOTHING ELSE.

THAT'S GOTTA BE LOGAN. OLD BASTARD'S LIKE A RUSTY NAIL WRAPPED IN BEEF JERKY.

OKAY. HOLD IT STEADY, BETSY.

ANGEL AND I WILL FIGURE SOMETHING OU--

HELLO, FRIEND! WE CAN EXPLAIN EVERYTHING WE'RE DOING UP HERE!

I KNOW THINGS LOOK BAD RIGHT NOW.

BUT BELIEVE ME... THEY COULD GET *SO MUCH WORSE.*

POLICE

OH, *COME ON.*

IS IT ME, BLAKE, OR DID THAT SOUND LIKE A THREAT?

COULD BE TAKEN THAT WAY, COMMANDER KEENE, YES.

AND THIS ONE-- WORTHINGTON-- HE HAS NO POWERS, CORRECT?

HE HAS ANOTHER INCARNATION--ARCHANGEL. THAT ONE'S A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH, MAKE NO MISTAKE. BUT THIS VERSION...NO. JUST FLIGHT.

GOOD.

TAKE HIM.

KS-SK

HNH.

彼を殺せ!

WII

NOPE.

I KNOW YOU'RE WATCHING, FAROUK. WATCHIN' AND LISTENIN'.

SO LISTEN TO THIS.

I AIN'T GONNA GET PULLED INTO ANY OF YOUR LIES.

I SEE YOU UP THERE.

AND I'M COMIN'.

MM. THIS LOGAN IS ***FORMIDABLE.*** HE ***UNDERSTANDS*** THIS PLACE.

I'M ALMOST IMPRESSED.

IN THE ASTRAL PLANE, REALITY IS WHAT YOU WILL IT TO BE.

YOU DON'T FIGHT HERE WITH *CLAWS.*

YOUR WEAPON IS YOUR *WILL.*

NOPE.

LOGAN HAS BUILT HIMSELF A REALITY. A VERY SIMPLE ONE, WITH ONLY TWO ELEMENTS.

THE LAIR OF HIS ENEMY, AND A PATH LEADING TO IT.

NOPE.

EACH STEP BRINGS HIM CLOSER.

HE HOLDS THESE TWO THINGS STEADY IN HIS MIND--MAINTAINS THEM AGAINST EVERY ASSAULT.

THE TEMPTATIONS, THE BATTLES, THE TRICKS THROWN AT HIM TO DIVERT HIM FROM HIS GOAL.

NOPE.

HE DIDN'T HAVE TO MAKE IT *COLD*, THOUGH. HE *CHOSE* TO. THAT'S ANOTHER OF HIS LITTLE SECRETS.

LOGAN WANTS TO WIN...BUT HE *NEEDS* TO SUFFER.

HOW IS HE *DOING* THIS?

HIS ENEMY'S FORTRESS, AND A PATH LEADING TO IT.

TO LOGAN, THEY ARE REAL. AND SO THEY *ARE* REAL, AND WILL LEAD HIM TO HIS GOAL, IF HE CAN JUST...

...KEEP...

...WALKING.

IT WILL BRING HIM...

...TO ME.

LOGAN. YOU MUST LISTEN. WE HAVE VERY LITTLE TIME.

NOPE.

HMM.

LOGAN...

YES.

AGH!

HOW THE HELL? YOU'RE *NOT REAL.* XAVIER IS *DEAD.*

I ASSURE YOU, I AM AS ALIVE AS ANYTHING CAN BE IN THIS PLACE.

I'LL KEEP KNOCKING YOU DOWN IF I MUST, BUT I WOULD PREFER TO *TALK.*

THE WORLD IS ENDING. ONLY THE X-MEN CAN SAVE IT.

YEAH?

NO %#!&, CHARLES.

CONTROL, THIS IS MISFIT 3. TARGET IS STILL IN DIALOGUE WITH MISFIT 2, AND IS SEPARATED FROM THE OTHER METAHUMANS. REQUESTING PERMISSION TO ENGAGE.

REQUEST GRANTED, MISFIT 3. SUBDUE TARGET. WE COULD USE A BIT OF LEVERAGE HERE.

I THINK IF WE ALL JUST CALM DOW--

ACKNOWLEDGED, CONTROL. ATTEMPTING TO SUBDUE TARGET.

KTHH

WHOA!

FSSSSH

WHY...

...WHY DID YOU DO THAT?

IS THAT--

THE ONE TO BE RECKONED WITH. YES, SIR. I'M AFRAID...WE'RE ABOUT TO LOSE EVERY MAN UP THERE.

NO. *NO.* I...

...I *FORGIVE* YOU.

WE ARE NOT TRYING TO HURT ANYONE. WE ARE TRYING TO *SAVE* EVERYONE.

SO--LET'S TRY THIS AGAIN, HUH?

I'LL GET INTO YOUR HELICOPTER, BE YOUR HOSTAGE, WHILE YOU SEND SOMEONE DOWN TO THE ROOF. PSYLOCKE CAN EXPLAIN WHAT'S HAPPENING.

DON'T YOU THINK THAT'S BETTER THAN EVERYONE SHOOTING EACH OTHER?

ANGEL... WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING UP THERE?

LOGAN, I REALIZE YOUR INTENTIONS WERE GOOD, BUT ALL FIVE OF YOU COMING INTO THE ASTRAL PLANE TOGETHER...IT JUST GAVE THE SHADOW KING FIVE NEW WAYS OUT.

FANTOMEX AND THE OTHERS AREN'T STRONG ENOUGH. THEY'RE ALREADY FALLING VICTIM TO FAROUK'S ILLUSIONS.

IF THEY DO, THEY'LL BE HIS PAWNS BACK ON EARTH.

BEFORE THAT HAPPENS, I NEED YOU TO--

YOU KNOW SOMETHING?

BACK WHERE I COME FROM, I WAS TRAPPED ON THE ASTRAL PLANE ONCE FOR ABOUT TWENTY YEARS. LEARNED MY SHARE OF TRICKS.

AND THEN I KILLED HIM.

FOUGHT THE SHADOW KING THE WHOLE TIME.

WE DON'T HAVE TWENTY YEARS. THE SHADOW KING YOU FOUGHT IS NOT THE ONE YOU'RE FIGHTING NOW.

HE'S BOOSTED HIS POWERS SOMEHOW, AND HE'S ON THE VERGE OF ESCAPING INTO THE REAL WORLD.

IF THAT HAPPENS, DARKNESS. EVERYWHERE.

YOU NEED TO *TRUST* ME.

TRUST YOU? BACK WHERE I COME FROM, YOU WEREN'T ALL THAT *TRUSTWORTHY.* AND JUST SO YOU KNOW, I KILLED *YOU,* TOO, BACK THERE.

CUT YOUR HEAD CLEAN OFF.

WHY... WHY WOULD YOU TELL ME THAT?

WHP

BECAUSE I AIN'T TELLIN' *YOU* ANYTHING.

I'M TALKING TO AMAHL FAROUK, AND I HOPE HE'S HEARIN' ME.

'CAUSE I'M *STILL COMIN'.*

LOGAN, YOU ARE WRONG. THE SHADOW KING CAN'T SEE US. I AM CURRENTLY MAINTAINING, AT GREAT EFFORT, AN ILLUSION.

WHEN HE LOOKS INTO THIS REALITY, HE SEES YOU BATTLING MR. SINISTER. THAT IS HOW WE CAN HAVE THIS CONVERSATION. BUT I CANNOT TRICK HIM FOR LONG. WE MUST ACT.

UH-HUH. TAKE IT EASY, DEAD MAN.

I'LL SEE YOU SOON.

I'M SORRY, LOGAN.

I CAN'T LET YOU DO THAT.

YOU MAY NOT BELIEVE IN ME, OLD FRIEND...

...BUT I BELIEVE IN YOU.

AGH!

SNIKT

IN LOGAN'S HEART, HE IS RUINED. BEYOND REDEMPTION.

SNIKT

BUT HERE IS ANOTHER ONE OF HIS SECRETS. THE GREAT, WONDERFUL TRAGEDY OF HIS EXISTENCE.

SOMETHING BURIED SO DEEP EVEN HE DOES NOT KNOW IT.

HE HAS CONVINCED HIMSELF THAT HE IS BEYOND REDEMPTION. USELESS.

HE IS WRONG.

HE HAS *MANY* USES.

GOOD ENOUGH.

HA!

I HAVE HIM, CHARLES.

YOU PUT UP A GOOD FIGHT, BUT THE MR. SINISTER ILLUSION FINALLY TOOK HIM.

HE IS MINE.

YES... I WAS AFRAID SOMETHING LIKE THIS MIGHT HAPPEN. LOGAN IS BLOOD-THIRSTY AND CRUEL. VIOLENCE IS HIS DRUG.

MM. YOUR HAND.

PLAYING AGAINST YOU ISN'T EASY FOR ME, FAROUK. YOU KNOW HOW STRONG YOU ARE. IT TAKES ITS TOLL.

DON'T PUSH YOURSELF TOO HARD, MY OLD FRIEND. JUST REMEMBER-- IT'S ONLY A GAME.

SO. THIS ROUND TO ME. I'M SURPRISED YOU AREN'T MORE UPSET, MY FRIEND. YOU USED TO HATE TO LOSE.

WELL, AMAHL... IF ONE OF THEM HAD TO GO, MIGHT AS WELL BE HIM. AFTER ALL, HE'S JUST A PRETENDER.

HE'S NOT MY LOGAN.

SEE? ISN'T THIS BETTER? I'M HERE WITH YOU, AND YOUR MAN'S ON THE ROOF WITH MY PEOPLE.

POLICE

"I'M SURE THIS WILL ALL BE SORTED OUT IN NO TIME."

MS. BRADDOCK, I'M SUPERINTENDENT BLAKE WITH THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE SUPERHUMAN CRISIS UNIT.

TELL ME WHAT'S HAPPENING UP HERE.

POLICE

THERE'S A SERIOUS PSYCHIC INCURSION IN PROGRESS FROM THE ASTRAL PLANE. A MONSTER THERE, THE SHADOW KING, IS ATTEMPTING TO BREAK OUT.

WE'RE TRYING TO STOP IT, BLAKE.

YOU STOP US, EVERYONE DIES. THAT SIMPLE.

FINE-- BUT FROM OUR PERSPECTIVE, YOU'VE ATTACKED LONDON.

WHAT *YOU'RE* SAYING MAY BE TRUE, BUT IT SEEMS LIKE THE CURE MAY BE WORSE THAN THE DIS--

NNF!

YOU KNOW...

...I DOUBT THAT VERY MUCH.

POLICE

TO BE CONTINUED...

HOUSE OF X

At any given day while walking down the HALLS OF X, I can't help but be amazed at all the uncanny stories our characters have been through. The sheer amount of imagination that's fueled epic missions, shocking demises, unexpected returns, tragic romances, jaw-dropping betrayals and acts of inspiring, selfless heroism is enough to power a small sun. As a reader I could hardly wait for the next issue. I'd scour the pages over and over for any hint or sign as to what might be in store for our misfortunate and misunderstood mutant heroes. I loved it when a writer, artist or editor would drop a subtle clue and get my speculative juices flowing.

In the past week I've walked down the Halls of X with some extremely imaginative storytellers. A few days ago, Greg Pak and Fred Van Lente came in to plan a special arc in WEAPON X. The next day Charles Soule came in to map out some amazing twists and turns coming in ASTONISHING X-MEN. About 24 hours ago, I met with a writer (who must remain anonymous) about some huge plans we have for the end of the year.

And, dear reader, I can't help but want to tell you about these incredible plans! I can, after all, appreciate a good near spoiler. But, alas, since I've taken an oath of secrecy I can only do my second favorite thing to editing X-Men comics and that's… to give you clues as to what's coming up in X-Men comics! For some arbitrary reason, let's do five:

Red!

Switch!

Mother!

Negative!

Séance!

X-MEN GOLD:

By Marc Guggenheim and R.B. Silva. Kitty Pryde takes charge and leads a new team into a heroic age!
Issue #12!

X-MEN BLUE:

By Cullen Bunn and Cory Smith. The time-displaced original five join their greatest enemy, Magneto. Evil mutants, you're toast!
Issue #11!

WEAPON X:

By Greg Pak and Greg Land. The Weapon X program is back, but this time they are building weapons of mutant destruction. Old Man Logan, Sabretooth and a team of stealthy killers take the bloody battle back to them.
Issue #7 on sale now!

ALL-NEW WOLVERINE:

By Tom Taylor and Leonard Kirk. A virus from another world threatens to wipe out mankind. Kicking off an epic tale that will take Laura Kinney to the stars.
Issue #24!

GENERATION X:

By Christina Strain and Amilcar Pinna. Jubilee and a band of mutant misfits in the new Xavier Institute. What could go wrong? EVERYTHING!
Issue #6!

JEAN GREY:

By Dennis Hopeless and Victor Ibáñez. She's the leader of X-MEN BLUE, but what does she do in her spare time? What would you do if you had a premonition of the Phoenix Force returning?
Issue #6 on sale now!

CABLE:

By James Robinson and Carlos Pacheco. A new villain is traveling through time to assemble a doomsday weapon. Cable's most dangerous mission ever!
Issue #4 on sale now!

ICEMAN:

By Sina Grace and Alessandro Vitti. The coolest hero on the planet, Bobby Drake the elder, in super-hero solo adventures.
Issue #6!

OLD MAN LOGAN:

By Ed Brisson and Mike Deodato Jr. The Maestro! Old Man Logan! Deodato! 'Nuff said!
Issue #28!

ASTONISHING X-MEN:

By Charles Soule and a murderers' row of chart-topping and up-and-coming artists. Fan-favorite characters battle one of the X-Men's most dangerous foes!
Issue #4!

Make sure to let us know your thoughts. You can email us at officex@marvel.com (add "OKAY TO PRINT" in the subject line). And don't forget about #XMENMONDAY on Twitter, where I'll post some tidbit from one or more of the books and address your questions. I can't guarantee an answer for everybody, but I'll do my darndest!

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ZONE